

## PROCESSING GRIEF AND LOSS ISSUES IN YOUNG CHILDREN

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Mothers Against Drunk Driving

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## What is Bereavement?

- ▣ What we go through after someone dies
  - Feelings
  - Decisions we have to make
  - Experiences
    - All the firsts



- Getting used to being w/o that person

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## What is Grief?

- ▣ All the feelings that come after someone you love dies
  - Sad
  - Mad
  - Lonely
  - Relieved
  - Hurt
  - Tired

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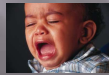
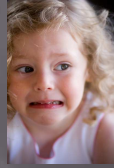
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## What is mourning?

- ❑ How people show their grief
- ❑ What we do with our grief




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## Reactions to Grief and Caregiver Responses

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Shock, denial, numbness</li> <li>❑ Indifference</li> <li>❑ Physiological changes</li> <li>❑ Anger</li> <li>❑ Regression</li> <li>❑ Disorganization and panic</li> <li>❑ Explosive emotions and acting out</li> <li>❑ Fear</li> <li>❑ Guilt</li> <li>❑ Relief</li> <li>❑ Loss, emptiness, sadness</li> <li>❑ Acting like an adult</li> <li>❑ Integration</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Support</li> <li>❑ Help kids become aware of feelings and normalcy of feelings</li> <li>❑ Reassurance that physical feelings are normal</li> <li>❑ Help kids move toward grief</li> <li>❑ Acceptance of feelings</li> <li>❑ Give opportunities to express and explore feelings</li> <li>❑ Provide comfort and reassurance</li> <li>❑ Feelings of relief are normal and acceptable</li> <li>❑ Remind child of role in family</li> <li>❑ Be sensitive</li> <li>❑ Normalcy and reassurance</li> </ul> |
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## DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF GRIEF

Things to consider when working with a grieving child.

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## Things to Consider

- ❑ Chronological Age
- ❑ Development Age
- ❑ What was their relationship or attachment with the deceased?

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## Understanding of death Birth-3 years

- ❑ No understanding
- ❑ Limited understanding
- ❑ Kids can sense something is wrong based on how adults are behaving

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## Behaviors of birth-3 year olds

- ❑ Increase separation anxiety
- ❑ Physical problems
  - Feeding or digestion issues
- ❑ Ways to provide comfort
  - **Basic Needs** to be met
  - Provide a blankie or special toy
  - Extra affection, increase attachment: snuggles, hugs, kisses, rocking, singing, story books, etc.

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### Understanding of death 3-5 years

- ❑ Reversible, the deceased will come back
- ❑ Pretend, magical, or fantasy thinking
- ❑ Words and phrases to avoid
  - Passed away
  - They're in a better place
  - God needed another angel
  - Asleep
- ❑ Words to use
  - DIED, DEAD, DECEASED

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### Behaviors of 3-5 year olds

- ❑ Regression-accept regressive behaviors
  - Bedwetting
  - Thumb sucking
- ❑ Asks same questions over and over
  - Olaf "Yeah, why? Yeah, why? Yeah, why?"
- ❑ Feels at fault or guilty
  - Reassure child is not at fault
  - Discuss how the body stops working
- ❑ Grief is interrupted by play only to have feelings of grief return

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### Understanding of death 6-7 Years old

- ❑ Beginning to see death as final but not for self
- ❑ May believe can escape death by behavior
- ❑ Death viewed as a spirit, thing, or person

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### Behaviors of 6-7 year olds

- ❑ Regression
- ❑ Repeat explanations may be needed
- ❑ Changes in behavior

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### Understanding of death 7-11 years old

- ❑ Death is irreversible
- ❑ Start to ask questions like "Am I next?" or "Who's next?"
- ❑ Concerns of details of after death

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### Behaviors 7-11 years old

- ❑ Regression
- ❑ Friends are becoming more and more important
- ❑ School performance may drop
- ❑ Take on role of deceased
  - Boys may feel the need to become the man of the house

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## Understanding of death 12 +

- ▣ Aware of their own mortality
- ▣ Attitudes toward death are becoming more like adults
- ▣ Survivor guilt

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## Behaviors of 12+

- ▣ Intense relationships
- ▣ Whys and what ifs
- ▣ School and extracurricular activities could suffer
- ▣ EMOTIONS
- ▣ Independence vs. dependence

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## Overview of Dos and Don'ts

- ▣ Dos
  - Be honest
  - Use appropriate words
    - DEAD, DEATH, DIED
  - Explain that death is the end/permanent
  - Be patient
  - Answer what the child asks, it is OK to say "I don't know"
  - Crying is OK for both the child and surviving adult to cry in front of one another
  - Encourage routine
  - Reassurance, reassurance, reassurance
  - Grief is an ongoing process
  - Let kids be kids
  - Get professional help if needed

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## Overviews of Dos and Don'ts

- ❑ Don'ts
  - Aren't you over this yet? It's been \_\_\_\_\_ months/years??
  - Let it go
  - Mommy went to a better place
  - God needed another angel
  - We lost Aunt Peggy
  - Time heals all wounds
  - At least you had so many years with them
  - But you have me

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## Saying Goodbye

- ❑ Include kids in planning the memorial where appropriate
- ❑ Plan a special meal or activity in memory of the loved one
- ❑ Gather pictures, clothes, other sentimental items and share stories
- ❑ Plant a tree memorial

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## Creating Memories and a New Normal

- ❑ Continue to celebrate important things related to your loved one
- ❑ Volunteer with an organization that has meaning or significance to your loved one
- ❑ Add in new routines and traditions
- ❑ Share with others who have experienced a similar death
- ❑ Plan a special trip or other occasion to look forward to

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## Questions




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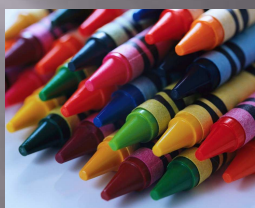
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## Activity




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## Resources

- ☐ When Families Grieve
  - By Sesame Workshop
- ☐ What Does That Mean?
  - By Harold Ivan Smith and Joy Johnson
- ☐ Bereavement Support Group Program for Children
  - By Beth Haasl and Jean Marnocha
- ☐ A Child's View of Death
  - The Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas
- ☐ Some Suggestions of talking with a Child about Death
  - The Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas

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